Pakistan, Sri Lanka Twenty20 washed out

DAMBULLA: Persistent rain washed out the second Twenty20 International between Sri Lanka and Pakistan in Dambullah without a ball being bowled on Friday.

The Salman Ali Agha-captained Pakistan lead the three-match series 1-0 after comfortably beating Sri Lanka by six wickets at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium on Wednesday.

The final game of the series will be played at the same venue on Sunday.

The series is a build-up for next month's ICC T20 World Cup, which will be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

Pakistan, who play all their World Cup games in Sri Lanka, are scheduled to host Australia for a three-match T20 series before the World Cup begins from Feb 7.

Sri Lanka are also due to host England in a white-ball series later this month.—Agencies

DAMBULLA: Sri Lankan players warm up during a rain delay in the second Twenty20 International against Pakistan at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium on Friday.—AFP

Another comeback evades Noor as ElShorbagy wins thrilller

KARACHI: There was no coming back for Noor Zaman this time around, even though the world under-23 champion came within a whisker of doing that all over again.

Two days after storming back from a two-day deficit and three since he overturned a 2-1 deficit to reach the last-16, a comeback evaded Noor at the Karachi Open on Friday.

Noor had clawed back two games to level the quarter-final tie against former world number one Mohamed ElShorbagy, only for the fourth-seeded Egyptian, who now represents England, to clinch a tightly-contested decisive fifth game to end Pakistan's representation at the US$243,000 championship, the biggest squash event in the country in two decades.

"He [Noor] was like a train — it was really hard to stop him," El Shorbagy said after his 11-2, 11-8, 6-11, 8-11, 11-9 victory in a clash that lasted two minutes under an hour. "Of course, I did doubt myself. I haven't won tough matches like this in a while. So to get a win is great. I'm just really glad to get through and to be into the semis."

ElShorbagy, who advances to a semi-final clash against Egyptian sixth seed Aly Abou Eleinen, started off at breakneck speed and took the first game in just six minutes. He then raced into a 4-0 lead in the second before Noor hit back to reduce the deficit to 10-8, only for ElShorbagy to find the winner.

Noor soon found his range and a partisan crowd at the DA Creek Club found its voice when the world number 38 took the third game, sealing it with a deft drop before taking the fourth game to send it to a decider.

Both Noor and ElShorbagy traded points in an end-to-end thrilling fifth before the latter opened a two-point advantage at 10-8 and closed out the victory.

The other semi-final will see top seed Karim Abdel Gawad of Egypt take on compatriot Mohamad Zakaria after the fifth seed took down Alex Lau in a 29-minute rout, winning 11-0, 11-3, 11-6.

There was an upset on the women's side as Malaysia's world number 33 Aifa Azman, the eighth seed, stunned third-seeded Fayrouz Aboelkheir to set up a semi-final against compatriot Sivasangari Subramaniam, the second seed.

Azman's resilience saw her come from two game balls down in the second game before taking the tie-break en route an 11-9, 13-11, 11-3 victory in just over half an hour.

Subramaniam, meanwhile, came back from an early wobble in the first game — where she had fallen behind 2-7, to beat seventh seed Lucy Turmel of England 13-11, 11-7, 11-9. —Sports Reporter

KARACHI: England's Mohamed Elshorbagy (front) in action during the Karachi Open quarter-final against Noor Zaman of Pakistan at the DA Creek Club on Friday. —Tahir Jamal/White Star

Semenyo wants to 'rewrite history again' after joining City

MANCHESTER: Antoine Semenyo said on Friday that he wants to "rewrite history again" at Manchester City after joining from Bournemouth for a reported fee of 65 million pounds ($87 million).

The 26-year-old, who has scored 10 Premier League goals this season, has signed a five-and-a-half-year deal at the Etihad and will be a major addition to their attacking arsenal.

Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur were also interested in the London-born Ghana international, who had a buyout clause that was understood to expire on Saturday.

The widely trailed transfer is the first major move by Premier League clubs in the January window.

"I have watched City over the last decade under Pep Guardiola, and they have been the dominant team in the Premier League as well as achieving amazing things in the Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup," said Semenyo. "They have set the highest of standards and it's a club with world-class players, world-class facilities and one of the greatest managers ever in Pep."

The winger said he wanted to be part of City's rebuild after a barren season last year. "I feel I'm improving but there are so many young players here who I think will be top players," he said. "I want to be part of that, and I want to rewrite history again."

His final act after three years with Bournemouth was scoring a spectacular stoppage-time winner in Wednesday's 3-2 victory against Tottenham.

City, dethroned as Premier League champions by Liverpool last season, have signed Semenyo to boost their challenge for silverware on four fronts.

Guardiola's men trail Arsenal by six points at the top of the Premier League and are still involved in the FA Cup, League Cup and Champions League.

City's options in wide areas are currently limited, with Savinho out injured and Omar Marmoush representing Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations. Guardiola confirmed at his pre-match press conference that Semenyo would be in his squad for City's FA Cup clash with third-tier Exeter on Saturday.—AFP

'Would be fun': Alcaraz, Sinner tease prospect of teaming up in doubles

SEOUL: Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner teased Friday the prospect of teaming up for doubles as the world's top two prepare to open their seasons with a lucrative exhibition match in South Korea, a week before the Australian Open.

The pair dominated men's tennis in 2025 and contested all four Grand Slam finals between them, with Spain's Alcaraz winning the French and US Opens and Italy's Sinner triumphing at the Australian Open and Wimbledon.

Speaking on the eve of their match in Incheon, the friends and rivals floated the idea of pairing up as a formidable team.

"I think it would be fun at least one time to share the court in different ways, on the same side," said Sinner, the world number two behind top-ranked Alcaraz. "Of course the schedule, and we are so focused on singles that it's very difficult because if then you go deep in singles and then you have to play doubles, you don't have the right recovery.

"But for one tournament I think it's great to do it, and we're going to talk about it maybe this year at a certain time where we feel like, or next year."

Alcaraz was also receptive to the idea, saying it had crossed his mind "once or twice". "At least once would be fun," he said. "I think I'm playing forehand and he's playing backhand."

Alcaraz and Sinner will be on opposite sides of the court when they square off again on Saturday, when they will play their only warm-up before the Australian Open starts on January 18.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz has been critical of tennis' packed schedule and pulled out of the Shanghai Masters in September because of "physical issues". He said playing in South Korea was "a great way to get ready" for Melbourne, where he is looking to go beyond the quarter-finals for the first time.

"I think coming here for two, three days, keep preparing, keep getting yourself ready for the new season, I think it was a great idea," he said. "I'm just really happy that I'm able to do this event, this match with Jannik."

Their rivalry has drawn comparisons with the "Big Three" of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, who ruled tennis for the early part of this century.

Sinner said he and Alcaraz "want to make our own story".

SEOUL: Italy's Jannik Sinner (L) and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain pose for a photo during a press conference at the Hyundai Card headquarters on Friday.—AFP

"We need to see how long we can keep up this level," said the 24-year-old, who won six titles last year despite missing three months over a doping ban. "What the big three has done, we cannot compare ourselves with them, and we also don't want to. We are just ourselves and we want to make our own story."—AFP

Al-Attiyah wins stage six for Dacia, retakes Dakar lead

RIYADH: Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah will lead the Dakar Rally into its second and final week after winning the sixth stage in the Saudi Arabian desert on Friday to take over at the top from South African rival Henk Lategan.

Al-Attiyah, a five-time Dakar winner now competing for the Dacia Sandriders, had been second overnight but turned a deficit of more than three minutes into a six-minute-and-10-second advantage over the 326km timed stage between Hail and Riyadh.

Saturday is a rest day before the rally resumes in Riyadh on Sunday with seven more stages to the finish in Yanbu on the Red Sea coast on Jan 17.

Al-Attiyah won Friday's stage by two minutes and 58 seconds from team-mate and nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb, Dacia's first Dakar one-two, with Toyota's American Seth Quintero third.

Overall, three different manufacturers filled the podium positions with Toyota's Lategan second and Ford's Nani Roma third — his first time on the virtual podium since 2019.

Al-Attiyah, 55, has now completed 19 successive Dakars with at least one stage win every time.

Friday was his career 49th stage win in the car category — one off the record held jointly by Ari Vatanen and 'Mr Dakar' Stephane Peterhansel.

Spaniard Carlos Sainz, father of the Formula One driver and a four-time Dakar winner still racing hard at the age of 63, was in fourth place for Ford with team-mate Mattias Ekstrom fifth and Loeb sixth.

American Mitch Guthrie, stage winner on Thursday for Ford, dropped to seventh from sixth.

In the motorcycle category there was no change at the top, although leader and defending champion Daniel Sanders was handed a six-minute penalty for riding at 98kph in a zone limited to 50kph.

KTM rider Sanders now leads Honda's American Ricky Brabec, the stage winner after the Australian's penalty, by 45 seconds with Argentine rider Luciano Benavides more than 10 minutes behind in third.

"It was an emotional rollercoaster all day. Unfortunately, I got a speeding penalty, so that will set me back a bit," said Sanders.

"I just pushed as much as I could today but its hard to do good in the sand, especially opening. I did the best I could and Ive got to stop making silly mistakes. I haven't pieced this first week together so well." —Reuters

DACIA'S Nasser Al-Attiyah and Fabian Lurquin in action during the sixth stage of the Dakar Rally, a 326km distance from Hail to Ryadh, on Friday. —Reuters

Australia's Head to skip Big Bash to prepare for T20 World Cup

MELBOURNE: Australia opener Travis Head will skip the Big Bash League (BBL) for a third straight season to rest and prepare for next month's Twenty20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, Cricket Australia (CA) said on Friday.

Head was a key figure in Australia's 4-1 Ashes victory against England, the left-hander finishing as the leading scorer of the series with 629 runs from five Tests.

Cameron Green will also be absent from the BBL after playing three Tests against England. The all-rounder, who does not have a BBL contract, is working to return to full fitness ahead of the World Cup after undergoing major back surgery in late 2024.

The board did not elaborate on World Cup squad members Pat Cummins (back) and Josh Hazlewood (hamstring) but the recovering pace duo are unlikely to be risked ahead of the global showpiece.

"A five-Test match Ashes series is intense," CA general manager, national teams, Ben Oliver said. "We have worked with each player on individual plans to best support recovery from the Ashes and preparation for upcoming international commitments including the ICC T20 World Cup.

"Wherever possible, this includes players representing their clubs in the ongoing BBL season over the coming fortnight.

Australia will begin their bid for a second T20 World Cup in a Group 'B' match against Ireland in Colombo on February 11.—Reuters

Age no barrier for rampant Australia but future uncertain

SYDNEY: Ashes hero Mitchell Starc insists age is just a number after Australia's 4-1 thumping of England, but the future of the "Dad's Army" is uncertain with a core of players in their mid-30s.

Man-of-the-series Starc, 35, was exceptional in leading the home attack in all five Tests, bowling 153 overs and bagging 31 wickets — more than anyone else.

He was ably supported by ever-reliable fellow seamer Scott Boland aged 36 while Steve Smith, 35, scored a 13th Ashes century and led them to victory as stand-in captain.

Fast bowler Michael Neser, 35, also played a key role, as did Travis Head (32) and Alex Carey (34).

It made a mockery of English taunts that Australia's "Dad's Army" — as they were branded before a ball was bowled — was over the hill.

Starc said after their five-wicket win in the final Test in Sydney on Thursday that "there's so much made about (the team's) age profile".

"I think at times through this series that experience has been a really good thing," he said. "We've seen guys prove that if you're still playing your role or if you're still good enough, it shouldn't matter how old you are.

"Our group do that really well and tailor programmes or preparation for that. And we've seen the results this year."

But with the bulk of Australia's triumphant Ashes squad on the wrong side of 30, what happens next for some of their biggest stars is unclear.

Opener Usman Khawaja saw the writing on the wall after being dropped mid-series aged 39 and announced his retirement, while injury clouds have circled fellow stalwarts Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon and Pat Cummins.

Hazlewood (hamstring and Achilles) missed the entire series, Cummins (back) managed just one Test and veteran spinner Lyon (hamstring) played only a bit-part role, dropped for the second Test and injured in the third.

Australia's next Tests are not until August, when they host Bangladesh, but none of the ageing core has given any indication they plan to up stumps anytime soon.

There are question marks about the quality of the talent coming through after them.

After that is a busy period culminating in a five-Test tour of India from late January 2027, then the 150th anniversary Test against England in Melbourne, before a return Ashes series later that year.

ONE MORE ASHES?

Playing India away and winning a first Test series in England since 2001 is a bucket-list item for players such as Starc and Smith.

"I'd love to go... but we've got plenty of cricket before then," Starc said, adding: "Part of the reason I gave away the T20 stuff was trying to prolong my Test career."

If fit, Cummins is a near-certainty to return as captain and lead the team to India and England while Lyon has indicated he too wants to be part of another Ashes, when he will be 39.

Head and Carey are in the form of their lives and going nowhere, while Marnus Labuschagne is another sure to keep going.

Smith is taking a series-by-series approach.

"I'm sure everyone's excited to go there and try and win the Ashes," Smith said. "It's something that I certainly haven't done in my career and something I'd like to tick off.

"Whether I get there or not, it's a different question."

While most of the team contributed to what Smith said was "a collective effort" in winning the Ashes, questions will be asked over the future of underperforming opener Jake Weatherald and allrounder Cameron Green.

Looking to the future, the likes of Campbell Kellaway, Matt Renshaw and Nathan McSweeney are other top-order options.

Todd Murphy is Lyon's understudy and young quick Fergus O'Neill could be a fast-bowling contender, along with Jhye Richardson and Lance Morris.—AFP